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240925Z May 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000639

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: SHIFTING ALLIANCES AMONG SHAN ARMIES

REF: A. RANGOON 507 AND PREVIOUS

1B. RANGOON 332 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: The Burmese regime has successfully pressured elements of ethnic cease-fire groups in Shan State to surrender their weapons. These groups comprise former rebels seeking autonomy or independence from Rangoon who were allowed to retain their arms as part of an agreement to give up fighting. The recent regime pressure has reportedly caused other ethnic militiamen to annul a heretofore observed cease-fire agreement and throw in their lot with insurgents still resisting the Burmese regime along the Burma-Thai border. The number of formerly pacified insurgents purportedly heading back to the warpath remains small. As an isolated incident, this development is probably insignificant. If it is the start of a trend, however, it could herald a return to low-intensity conflict in many parts of northeast Burma and added turmoil in border areas. End Summary.

12. (C) With much fanfare, the SPDC has over the past six weeks succeeded in convincing three small ethnic military groups in Shan State to surrender their arms. They include Aik Mone's Palaung State Liberation Party (cease-fire since 1991) two units of the Shan State National Army (SSNA) (cease-fire since 1995). Following pressure by the Burmese Army, Shan sources report that on May 21, one SSNA group surrendered over 300 soldiers and their families along with some small armaments. Shan sources allege that this unit transferred its heavier weapons to other SSNA units before the full surrender.

13. (C) Shortly thereafter, the commander of SSNA, Col. Sai Yi, and three remaining SSNA "brigades" with an estimated strength of around 2,000 soldiers, reportedly declared an alliance with the largest insurgent movement in Shan State, the SSA-S. Shan sources report that it was the regime's strong pressure on the cease-fire groups to hand over their arms that caused Col. Sai Yi and his troops to abrogate the 1995 cease-fire agreement and throw his support behind the SSA-S.

14. (C) On May 22, the Burmese Army reportedly moved three battalions to seal off the SSNA's stronghold near Mong Yin in central Shan State. Key SSNA leaders and the bulk of the holdout SSNA soldiers are reported to have moved to an area near the Thai border controlled by SSA-S and thus beyond the current reach of the Burmese Army.

Comment: Rumbblings in the Hinterland

15. (C) The arrest of Shan political leaders in February (ref B), an overblown PR campaign to discredit an exile-led declaration of Shan independence effort (ref A), and the orchestrated surrender of small armed groups underscore the regime's considerable paranoia over ethnic issues in general, and Shan aspirations for greater autonomy in particular. The GOB's efforts have in part served to solidify disparate Shan groups, angered by the heavy-handed treatment, to resist domination by Rangoon.

16. (C) The SSNA's apparent declaration marks the first collapse of one of the regime's 17 cease-fire agreements brokered by former PM Khin Nyunt. A tie-up between the SSNA and the SSA-S is unlikely to pose a serious threat to the SPDC's grip on power (indeed, we would expect a swift response by the Burmese Army to neutralize the SSNA holdouts). However, further consolidation among Shan State's archipelago of sundry cease-fire and insurgent groups could certainly complicate things for the regime. End Comment.
Martinez